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TRADITIONS AND INNOVATIONS ON THE FRONTIER TERRITORIES

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Abstract

Traditionally, the problem of the relationship between tradition and innovation is considered within the framework of a conditionally homogeneous society within the linear structure of its development. In this context, traditions are symbolically identified with regression, while innovations – with progress, science and technology. However, traditionalists believe that traditions may save society from the destruction that will inevitably follow the abandonment of traditional values. Scientists have already shown that this binary view simplifies the problem, removing us from understanding how tradition/innovations are functioning in the modern society. The authors believe that the unambiguous perception of tradition and innovation completely loses its meaning in the case of the Frontier, developing through cultural encountering when one ethnic tradition turns out to be an innovation for another society. The Frontier constantly changes the actors of this dialogue, forcing them to adapt to new conditions: cultural, natural, social. Keeping in mind the fact that the Frontier itself is constantly in transformation, this dialogue of tradition-innovation turns out to be permanent. It cannot lose its power, setting new frames to the participants. The statuses of donor/recipients are losing their importance due to constant changes, even if the participants of the dialogue perceive their opponent in negative way. Negation of the Natives by the newcomers did not prevent them from borrowing actively local traditions to use their resources. At the present stage, a number of frontier territories are witnessing once again a revival of cultural dialogue, accompanied by an active exchange of cultural patterns.

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1. Introduction

Most scientists agree that almost all societies are subject to change. Nowadays, it is difficult to imagine any society that has not changed over the long period of its existence. Although scientists know the existence of such societies in the past, there are practically no such examples today, with the exception of the indigenous inhabitants of the Andaman Islands and isolated Amazonian tribes. In their cases, too, one cannot be sure that there are no significant changes in their lives due to sporadic contacts with the ethnic groups around them, which modify their daily pattern.

The changes taking place in modern societies are generally the result of two major trends. The first one is generated by scientific and technical development in society and is a consequence of technological progress. The second trend is caused by globalization, i.e. global distribution of new values, ideas, goods, etc. As a result, the local society is involved in a universal system of products and ideas, in which there is little space for traditional values and familiar elements of culture. In this situation, the traditional culture loses daily its basic elements, displaced by new, brought from the outside. New patterns of clothes, new cuisine, new furniture, new artwork. In this opposition to traditional culture, the changes generated by new, technological breakthroughs or globalization processes, traditional patterns are left with less space, resulting in the leveling of ethnic culture, sometimes to its complete loss. The world is trying to save endangered animals or plants but does little to save «endangered» cultures. Although the question of the impact of processes of globalization and modernism on traditional society is not new, we would like to exacerbate the problem, setting it in the framework not just of the confrontation of tradition to the process of innovation and influences from the outside, but in terms of «cultural encounters».

2. Problem Statement

Traditionally, the problem of transition from tradition to novelty is described within certain processes. We have already mentioned that this is mainly within the framework of technological progress or globalization. Most often, the problem is analyzed within the field of epistemology. In Russian discourse, this problem is usually actualized within the problem of cultural safety with the predominance of axiological characteristics with rigid opposition: tradition is good, innovation is evil. Often, the main arguments are replaced by an appeal to spiritual, identified with tradition, and cultural borrowings are perceived as a betrayal of their own culture. In contrast, supporters of modernization and cultural changes in society oppose traditions. But no matter how the arguments of supporters of one or another strategy of the development of society lined up, most of them are caught up by the rigid framework of the axiological choice of good/bad. As a part of these approaches, the tradition is in opposition to modernization, technological progress, cultural borrowings. At a symbolic level, tradition symbolizes the past and innovations are on the side of the future. Thus, the watershed conventionally passes through the past/future; regression/progress; ignorance, savagery, backwardness/education, knowledge, modernity. In many ways, the concept of «tradition» was reduced to the concept of «out-of-date» patterns that do not contribute to the development of society and has become synonymous with archaism in the meaning of «traditional society» (Morris, 2013). All this is easy to see in the titles of most of the works devoted to this problem. As a rule, the analysis of the concepts of «tradition» is paired with the concepts of «modernization», «innovation».

At the same time, these two last concepts are inexorably linked with the concepts of «knowledge», «technology», «science». Frankelius (2009), analyzing the scientific literature on innovations, revealed that the main content of such literature was necessarily connected with two aspects: high-tech knowledge, generated by technical progress; with the knowledge developed by the university science. In his opinion, such approach narrows this problem, distorting the very concept of innovation, since “innovation may be related to and occur in many other areas besides technology, such as art or social care services” (Frankelius, 2009, p. 45). Rogers (2003), who dedicated a special study to innovation, also defines innovation without rigid reference to the technological components: An innovation is an idea, practice, or object that is perceived as new by an individual or other unit of adoption. It matters little, so far as human behavior is concerned, whether or not an idea is «objectively» new as measured by the lapse of time since its first use or discovery. The perceived newness of the idea for the individual determines his or her reaction to it. If an idea seems new to the individual, it is an innovation (Rogers, 2003).

All this demonstrates the fact that often the analysis of the functioning of tradition and innovation in society takes place within the frames of rigid concepts that do not contribute to the understanding of their phenomenon. In these circumstances, the concepts of «tradition» and «innovation» are completely blurred, and many traditions are only «late inventions». In this case, “invented tradition’ is... a set of practices, normally governed by overtly or tacitly accepted rules and of a ritual or symbolic nature, which seek to inculcate certain values and norms of behavior by repetition, which automatically implies continuity with the past. In fact, where possible, they normally attempt to establish continuity with a suitable historic past” (Hobsbawm, 2012, p. 54). In this interpretation, ‘the invented tradition’ will differ little from innovation, which may also turn out to be just a recent invention, i.e. ‘innovation’.

3. Research Questions

From our point of view, the problem of correlation between tradition and innovation may take other forms, especially in cases that are not reducible only to the history of the West, but not necessarily it should be Eastern society, although their model is significantly different from Western. We will try to show that outside the European tradition, this problem of tradition-innovation relationship takes completely different forms and different modalities. Although the problem of tradition and modernization in the Non-Western societies has already been actively discussed in the scientific literature (Chen, 2009; Sheikhzadegan & Meier, 2017), we believe that and this question remains open. Recently, scientists have increasingly pointed out that there are alternative modernities (Faubion, 1988; Gaonkar, 2001) or multiple models (Eisenstadt, 2002; Eisenstadt, 2003; Sachsenmaier, Eisenstadt, & Riede, 2002; Preyer & Sussman, 2016). All this necessitates a very critical attitude to this problem, and although, as Faubion (1988) notes, the main opinions converge on the definition of modernity, there is considerable disagreement about the allocation of the most important features of this phenomenon, and how it fits into the historical process.

The format of the article doesn’t permit us to give here all the arguments *pro et contra* of the use of these terms, so we will talk about special cases in which the traditional approach to the terms tradition/innovation is almost completely excluded. We will focus on the special spaces of cross-cultural encounter in which the concepts of tradition and innovation are completely levelled, getting a completely new meanings. One of such spaces is the frontier. By the frontier, we mean “a territory or zone of

interpenetration between two previously distinct societies” (Lamar & Thompson, 1981, p.10). In other words, it is a space of meetings of cultures with different levels of development:

The concept ‘frontier’ refers to a meeting point where two forces come up against each other, whether they be groups of human beings or such vague things as civilization and wilderness. It should be stressed that there can be no frontier without the meeting of at least two entities, a coming up against each other; in short, a contact situation. (Forbes, 1968, p. 219)

As a result, a new cultural landscape is formed, in which the usual meaning of the concept of ‘tradition’ and ‘innovation’ changes radically.

4. Purpose of the Study

In this article, we would like to highlight another problem, going beyond the established approaches to tradition and innovation, which are analysed in the framework of the ‘traditional’ situations of Western development. Since the Frontier is a space of ‘dynamic interaction’ of different cultures, this means that any element borrowed by one culture from another turn out to be both a ‘tradition’ and an ‘innovation’. All this leads to a special cultural dialogue, which produces a powerful cultural shift. Different cultural elements are constantly moving within this frontier space. Under these conditions, traditional approaches that correlate tradition with the past, and innovation with progress, cease to play any significant role. Therefore, our task is to understand the mechanism of functioning of this heterogeneous society, which is in constant dynamics.

5. Research Methods

The fact that “a frontier is an instance of dynamic interaction between human beings and involves such processes as acculturation, assimilation, miscegenation, race prejudice, conquest, imperialism and colonialism” (Forbes, 1968, p. 213) makes us to resort to several methodological approaches. Considering that we analyze the problem of interaction of tradition and innovation at the Frontier, we are forced to take the Turnerian model of Frontier as a basis (Turner, 1920), as Turner was the first to show the importance of this kind of territory for the development of the state, the formation of a new political, social and cultural paradigms. Turner's theory will be supplemented by new approaches, primarily underlined by Limerick (1994) and Riley (2003, 2004). Since the object of our analysis is a heterogeneous culture formed at the junction of several cultures, we use the methods developed by Burke (2009) for such societies.

6. Findings

The analysis of the Frontier in different countries shows that the cross-cultural encounter inevitably leads to the mutual borrowing of cultural elements by different ethnic groups. In this situation an ethnic tradition borrowed by another group turns into innovation. Therefore, any borrowing leads to the emergence of a new cultural situation, to rethinking the national culture and to attempt to fit innovation into the usual mundane context. Yet Turner (1920) noted that the Frontier promoted the formation of a composite

nationality for the American people. The coast was preponderantly English, but the later tides of continental immigration flowed across to the free lands. This was the case from the early colonial days. The Scotch-Irish and the Palatine Germans, or «Pennsylvania Dutch», furnished the dominant element in the stock of the colonial frontier (Turner, 1920). Later, new waves of Germans from other regions, French, Italians, Russians, Ukrainians, Jews, Swedes, Chinese, Japanese and representatives of other Nations added to the previous of colonists. The list would be incomplete if we did not mention Afro-Americans, who came to the Frontier in different statuses: from slaves to free citizens. However, listing all these groups, we should not forget about Native Americans, who were radically different in their culture from the European colonists. Although there were military clashes between them and the newcomers from time to time, cultural exchange was very intense.

There was nothing unique in what was happening on the American Frontier. The colonization of Siberia, especially in the 19th century, also took place with the participation of the most diverse ethnic groups: Russians, Ukrainians, Germans, Poles, etc. (Kaufman, 1905). Obviously, all these waves of immigrants mixed actively with the local population, forming a unique hybridity. Elements of the traditional culture of the local population intensively penetrated into the everyday life of colonists, and a number of traditions borrowed from native cultures has become an integral part of the Russian cultural landscape of Siberia. The borrowing of traditions from the local cultures, using different words from local languages, or even switching to local languages was the essence of this process, in which the concepts of tradition and innovation were closely intertwined. In addition, the transformation of the colonist culture also took place under the influence of the adaptation of settlers to new natural conditions, as a result of the emergence of new economic complexes, often resembling local models. All these processes were called «going native». They were analyzed by various authors. The Siberian content was analyzed by Sunderland (1996), Remnev and Suvorova (2013), Yakushenkov and Yakushenkova (2016). Caucasian cases were described by Mamedov, (2008). Huhndorf (2001) and Thorp (2003) analyzed the American and other countries experiences. As a rule, this transformation of traditions into innovation was in the early stages of colonization that allows us to say that in this period we are dealing with a quasi-innovation, i.e. the introduction to the cultural practice of traditions of other peoples. If we take into account that in the process of such contacts, a new Metis ethnic group is born, which turns out to be the bearer of two cultural traditions, then for the Metis any quasi-innovation will remain a tradition – either through his father or through his mother. The decisive role in determining vectors of development in this group will play only by self-identification of the group. Yet in the early stages of the Frontier, several vectors of such trends can be distinguished. In some cases, even within the frames of traditionalist approaches aimed at preserving their cultural homogeneity, the mechanisms for its preservation turn out to be innovative, such as the Ghost Dance in American Wild West at the end of the 19th century, which was a fully new cultural construct and had nothing in common with old traditions. At the same time, the New Age movement among Americans in the end of the 20th century, claimed to be the traditions of the Native Americans, in fact was an «invented tradition», which had no relations with traditional culture (Deloria, 1998).

7. Conclusion

Although the problem of relations between tradition and innovation is in the focus of attention of various scholars, its final solution is far from complete. Although the dichotomy of tradition/innovation is grounded in customary consciousness on antagonistic symbols of regression/progress, it cannot be directly correlated with them. Such approach is only correct to a limited number of cases and in a clearly defined period. That's why some scholars started to talk about the relativity of traditions-innovations, as most traditions are late inventions. The analysis of the special situations of the Cultural Encounter on the Frontier allows us to look at traditions/innovations in a different light due to the fact that most innovation for one ethnic group is a tradition for others. So the new society emerging on the Frontier is both traditional and innovative. Under these conditions, the acceptance of tradition often is actualized within the frames of the new ethnic identity construction.

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